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SUBJECT: EGYPT'S WAR ON FLUQPIG FARMERS CLASH WITH CULL TEAMS

REF: a) Cairo 724 b) Cairo 743

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

11. (SBU) Key Points:

-- There have been reports of sporadic clashes between pig farmers and GOE culling team as the pig cull in Egypt enters its second week. There is a heavy police presence in the Makkattam area on Cairo's east side, home to many of the country's backyard pig farms.

-- Despite the resistance, the GOE cull continues, albeit very slowly. The government appears to be backtracking on its decision not to offer compensation.

12. (SBU) COMMENT: The decision to slaughter Egypt's pigs was made quickly in an atmosphere of fear and ignorance. Egypt has been plagued by Avian Influenza (AI) since early 2006. This year, Egypt has had more AI victims than any other country in the world; seventeen Egyptians have fallen sick (many of them young children), and three have died. The three deaths, including one of a young child, occurred days before the H1N1 virus scare. The H5N1 virus also continues to decimate poultry flocks. The GOE has been the target of public and media criticism for its handling of the AI issue, which is endemic in Egyptian poultry, as well as increasingly vaccine resistant.

13. (SBU) COMMENT CONT'D: There is some scientific evidence that pigs serve as viral mixing bowls and can and have been infected with the H5N1 AI virus in Asia. Animal husbandry practices among Egypt's poor include very close human and animal contact, including in metropolitan Cairo. Egypt's parliament, including its Coptic members, supported the cull, as did Pope Shenouda III, on the basis of protecting the greater public good. The economic impact of the cull will be borne almost exclusively by Coptic Christian pig farmers, already a poor and marginalized group. Despite this, most Coptic leaders, both lay and from the clergy, tell us they do not believe the GOE's motives are sectarian. One Coptic bishop, however, told us that the church is supporting the cull because it fears a backlash if it resisted and there subsequently were an H1N1 outbreak here. The church is pushing hard to ensure that the pig farmers receive fair compensation. END COMMENT.

THE CULL CONTINUES

14. (SBU) GOE pig culling teams continue to work their way through Egyptian pig farms. There have been several clashes between farmers, on the one hand, and cull teams and police escorts on the other. Most of the incidents, involving assaults and rock-throwing, have taken place in Giza, on Cairo's west side and in the Christian enclave of Makkattam, on the east where many of Cairo's backyard pig

farms are located. Embassy Cairo's Regional Security Office issued a Security Notice concerning the situation and we have also sent a Consular Warden message. Since May 3, the police presence on the outskirts of Makkattam has been heavy.

15. (SBU) We met with community leaders in Manshiyat Nasser, part of the greater Makkattam area on May 6. They confirmed that the police escorted pig culling teams have been moving slowly and cautiously through the neighborhood, home to over 60,000 people, many of whom are "ziballeen" -- garbage collectors. These community leaders estimate that to date the culling teams have killed or removed only about 3,000 of the 70,000 pigs that lived on 460 farms in the Manshiyat Nasser neighborhood before the slaughter began. The culling teams have treated the farmers courteously. According to the community leaders, few farmers have received compensation, and those that were paid received only "pennies."

#### THE PLAN

16. (SBU) According to GOE sources on May 4, the current plan is to eliminate all pigs within thirty days (ref b), pay some compensation to owners, allow them to sell meat if the veterinary authorities deem it safe, and permit the pig industry to start anew with special breeds in selected areas where biosafety and cleanliness standards are established and enforced. The local press, however, is reporting that the culling effort could take as long as six months because the GOE does not have enough slaughterhouses.

17. (SBU) Egypt's Ministries of Health and Population (MOH) and Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR) have made enormous gains against AI, especially in terms of public awareness, human victim survival rates, surveillance and genetic work. The GOE has also

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been particularly transparent about reporting human cases as they occur. Unlike some other countries, Egypt quickly reports all human AI cases to the World Health Organization (WHO).

18. (SBU) Egypt's Parliament and media are increasingly frustrated over the GOE's continued failure to stop the H5N1 virus, now endemic in Egypt despite mass bird culling and large -- albeit somewhat chaotic -- vaccination programs. Shortly before the H1N1 virus emerged, the GOE was reviewing its approach to Avian Influenza, looking for way to improve poultry movement control, and an approach to the commercial sector combining compensation for farms that fall victim to the virus with stiff penalties for failure to report outbreaks. But GOE programs have fallen far short of their goals, and the public tends to greet AI initiatives cynically, including the 2008 Presidential Proclamation, which was not widely acted upon, to move pigs outside of urban areas.

19. (SBU) WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) representatives failed to weigh in with science-based arguments when the debate over the swine cull was raging in Egypt and their voices could have had an impact. On April 29, Al Masry Al Youm, a widely read, independent newspaper, reported that EMRO's Regional Director said the "problem is the presence of pigs near humans" and "the problem must be eliminated, either dispose of or transfer pig farms to places far from population centers."

110. (SBU) While some Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated MPs highlighted religious reasons to get rid of pigs in Egypt (ref a) the Egyptian Parliament, including several Coptic MPs, was virtually unanimous in its call for a pig-free Egypt. When Coptic Primate Pope Shenouda III sanctioned the culling (claiming that "Copts don't eat pigs, tourists do") and the Governors of Kalubia, Helwan, Beheira, Suez and Minya started culling pigs at the local level, there was considerable pressure on the central government to follow suit. Although the decision to go ahead with the cull has been criticized internationally, it has proven very popular domestically and the press is full of praise for what are seen as the GOE's strong and effective actions to control H1N1.

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